

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000158

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: IT'S THE IRANIANS' FAULT - SOUTHERN SUNNIS' DISCONTENT WITH THE ELECTION

CLASSIFIED BY: Kenneth Gross, Regional Coordinator, Basrah Regional Embassy Office, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: On December 27, the Basrah Deputy Regional Coordinator met with Haji Khalaf El Eisah, the head of the Iraqi Islamic Party (List 618) in Basrah and his deputy, Dr. Jamal. Both Haji Khalaf and Dr. Jamal stated they were upset with the way the parliamentary elections had been conducted in the south.

They alleged that widespread fraud and election tampering prevented thousands of Sunni votes from being counted. Haji Khalaf said that he was trying to encourage Sunni Arabs to continue with the political process, but he was not optimistic that he would succeed. Both he and Dr. Jamal repeatedly stated that Iranian interference and influence in the south continues to cause widespread suffering among the Sunni Arab population. End Summary.

Angry Allegations of Fraud

¶12. (C) On December 27, the Basrah Deputy Regional Coordinator met with Haji Khalaf El Eisah and Dr. Jamal, the Iraqi Islamic Party leaders in Basrah, to discuss the results of the December 15 election. Haji Khalaf said he was upset with the way the elections were conducted and asked Dr. Jamal to cite several examples of fraud. Dr. Jamal alleged that of the 7,000 detainees at Camp Bucca, 2,000 had voted for 618. However, he said that the vote counters defaced 1,000 of these votes, and therefore the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) refused to include them in the totals. In addition, according to Dr. Jamal, Sunni Arab election observers were barred from entering Camp Bucca.

¶13. (C) Dr. Jamal's second example of fraud involved 500 people at an unnamed polling center who could not produce proper identification. Allegedly, these individuals became angry when they were not permitted to vote and threatened to kill the polling station manager and surrounded the polling center, preventing others from voting. Fearing for his life, the polling station manager allowed the 500 people to vote. Dr. Jamal stressed that this shows clearly how Iraqi security during the elections was a "big joke."

¶14. (C) Finally, Dr. Jamal said that more than 30,000 Iraqi policemen in Basrah all voted three times. (NOTE: Besides the obvious exaggeration in this statement, there are only about 15,000 policemen in Basrah. END NOTE.) Dr. Jamal said that each policeman voted on the 13, 14 and 15 of December and many voted in different polling stations. He commented that Iraqi policemen were using their uniforms and guns to enter the polling stations and vote for the United Iraqi Alliance (555). Haji Khalaf added that there were about 100,000 fraudulent votes cast for the 555 List and said he had filed complaints with the IECI, but has not had any feedback.

Little Hope for the Future

¶15. (C) Haji Khalaf opined that Sunnis hoped to regain a political identity through the election process, but had been disappointed. Because of the fraud and the lack of corrective action, it is difficult to persuade members of his community to continue with the political process. He said he could not stop people from trying to take back their rights. He added that 40 other political parties felt the same way as the Sunni Arabs and would not accept the results of the elections. Haji Khalaf stated that the Iraqi Islamic Party was attempting to get the UN to investigate electoral fraud, but that if people could not get their votes counted, they would resort to violence.

Iranian Influence and Interference

¶16. (C) Both Haji Khalaf and Dr. Jamal expressed their dismay over what they regard as Iranian "infiltration" of the political process. Dr. Jamal pointed to the head of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), Abdul Aziz al Hakim, who allegedly spent more than 30 years in Iran. In addition, Dr. Jamal mentioned the inability of the Iraqi Intelligence Service to open an office in Basrah. He said that when they attempted to do so one year ago, all the officers were killed. Haji Khalaf added that all the Iraqi pilots who fought against Iran during the Iraq-Iran war were being killed one by one.

17. (C) When asked by the Deputy Regional Coordinator for more concrete instances of Iranian interference, Dr. Jamal and Haji Khalaf only could cite the uncovering of various weapons caches found by British and Iraqi security forces. In addition, they mentioned a report of trucks found on the Iraqi-Iranian border heading to Basrah with counterfeit ballots. When pressed for more examples, Dr. Jamal said that President Bush did not have concrete, specific evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq when he decided to overthrow Saddam Hussein. He added that President Bush had only a lot of reports and a strong feeling that there was WMD in Iraq. So too did they have a strong feeling of Iranian interference in Basrah.

Comment

18. (C) Haji Khalaf and Dr. Jamal both welcomed the visit of the Deputy Regional Coordinator and the opportunity to voice their concerns and complaints, which were most likely exaggerated. Both were overly pessimistic about the results of the election and hinted at the possibility of violence. However, they also realize that a continuous dialogue with the United States is one of the best ways to push forward their agenda. Haji Khalaf and Dr. Jamal want to use the "Iran card" and play on U.S. suspicions regarding Iran as a way to prompt the Americans into action on their behalf. End Comment.

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